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A WITNESS OF LIFE page 3

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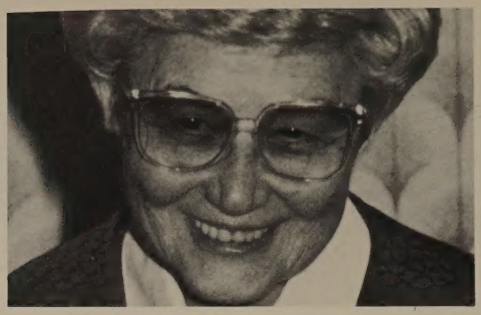

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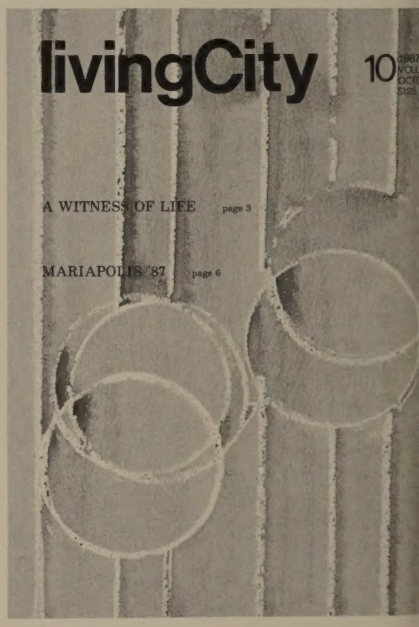

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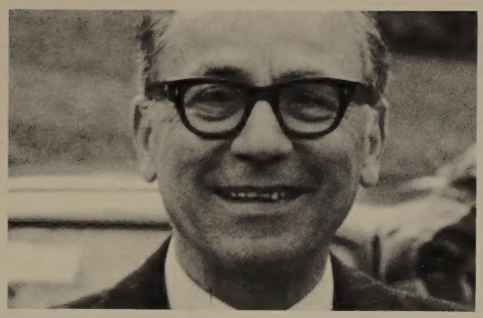
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED: MANKIND FIRST: A commentary article on the "Instruction on Respect for Human Life"— The Vatican's contribution to the bioethics debate.



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The Two Pillars

A proposal for those interested in journeying to God along the way of unity.

God who created us has also called us to sanctity. This is true for every human being.

The call to sanctity, in fact, is universal. This has been affirmed often this year as preparations for the Bishops Synod on the Laity in October were under way.

Everyone should attain their perfection and those who set themselves to the task arrive at the goal through different ways.

We also have our way. We often say that we can reach sanctity by doing the will of God.

What is the specific will of God for us, though?

For us the will of God is to go along a way of sanctity which is collective. To do this, we need to keep in mind two elements of our spirituality which we cannot do without, i.e., that we cannot reach sanctity unless we keep the Risen Lord alive in us and among us.

We live in a world in which wherever we turn we find something which is in opposition to Christ and his mentality. We breath in the everpresent atmosphere of consumerism, hedonism, materialism, secularism.

How can we bring the presence of God into today's society in an always more constant and effective manner and to as many as possible?

How can we defend ourselves from the snares always ready to trap us and discourage us? How can we keep the resolutions made in moments of grace?

It seems to me we can do so by overcoming any personal difficulty with the love of Jesus Forsaken thus letting the Risen Lord live in us, and by building unity with our brothers and sisters so that the Risen Lord might be among us.

By ourselves this would be hard to achieve. For this reason, our spirituality which we call "collective" can help, precisely because it is lived by a number of persons together.

We are witnesses to the need for unity. When is it that we most easily give up in our daily struggle to live a Christian life? When do doubts about one's vocation most easily arise? It is when the presence of Jesus among us is compromised, when we are alone.

It is logical. "Woe to him who is alone,"[1] we read in Scripture, and "A brother helped by another brother is like a fortress."[2]

The fact is, as John Chrysostom magnificently explained, that "Great is the strength which comes from being united ... because when we are united, charity grows and if charity grows, necessarily the reality of God grows among us."[3]

It is from God, the strength we experience in unity; it is from the presence of Jesus in our midst. For us who are travelling along the way of unity, the presence of Jesus in the midst is essential to successfully reach the goal of sanctity.

We must always revive his presence in our groups, our conventions, our families or we will fail.

And if it happens to be God's will for us to be far from others or alone, we need to seek every opportunity to establish Jesus' presence with some other person who shares our ideal. Only in this way will we have the light, strength, peace and ardor which are indispensable for our complete fulfillment.

Chiara Lubich

1) Ecc 4:10; 2) Prov 18:19; 3) In Ep ad Hebr 19,1.

A Witness of Life

The foundress of the Focolare Movement answers questions on the laity in the Church.

compiled by Guglielmo Boselli

When Igino Giordani[1] spoke of the laity, he expressed with light hearted humor a well founded fear which he had worked so hard to counter-act: that lay people would continue to be, and most of all be seen as, second class citizens in the Church, some sort of anonymous group from which every once in a while some emerge and go on to become saints after consecrating themselves to God.

He was happy to discover that in the Focolare Movement celibate and married persons lived the same reality and they did it together, enacting the principle dear to him, that before God the "state of perfection" does not count as much as the perfection one attained in that state. Another way of saying this: those who love the most are further ahead, whatever their way might be. It was years before Vatican II when he was expressing these thoughts which began to make headway already then and led lay people to wake up and no longer feel like passive followers in the Church but protagonists as were the priests and religious, nothwithstanding a different calling.

Giordani, would probably be pleased now to know of the Synod taking place this month in Rome.

Cardinal Pironio, head of the Vatican Secretariat for the laity, during an international preparatory meeting held at Rocca di Papa said that it was the Holy Father himself who wanted this Synod. The Pope, he said, wished to provide Catholic laity with the opportunity of expressing their views on an international level. "The Pope wants the laity to be heard; he has insistently repeated it in public, in private, and in the personal letter sent to every bishop accompanying a reference text for the Synod entitled "Intrumentum Laboris," a document which is intended to be neither definitive in nature nor all-inclusive in its exposition of a theology of the laity.

The fact is that the laity (both men and women) represent the enormous majority of Church members and their relationship to priests and religious, their participation in the global mission of evangelization of the Church, their presence as Church in the world of the family, in the world of culture, work, in the social order, in the areas of politics, economics, international relations, are all topics extremely important and timely. We can understand the importance of focusing on the laity, then, in order to have a complete vision of the Church, of Christian life, and Christian involvement in the world. These topics will be among those dealt with at the Synod.

Chiara Lubich participated in the international preparatory meeting to the Synod held at Rocca di Papa. We here publish some questions that were asked of Chiara subsequent to that meeting in light of her role as the founder and animator of a large international movement composed primarily of lay persons. ►

Question: How would you define the lay person in the Church?

Chiara: Frankly the people we refer to as laity in the Church I would rather call Christians. It seems to me more of a worthy title. The fact that the term "lay person" is used ambiguously makes the change in terminology all the more appropriate. In the political realm in some countries, for example, "lay" is used to refer to those who are not Christian. I would propose, therefore, that we call ourselves Christians, it's the most beautiful term. We are Christians together with the bishops and priests but we are Christians also as lay persons since we are baptized.

To add the word "faithful" (Christian faithful) sounds a bit reductionistic to me. We are Christians and called so from the times of the early community of Antioch.

Perhaps today we are to some extent linked to a certain tradition that tended to consider the laity separate from those who consecrated themselves to God. For centuries the laity were spoken of as such. However, now that there is a Synod on the laity this tradition could be broken and we could be called simply "Christians."

Question: The preparatory document to the Synod of Bishops refers to the vocation of the laity and the specific mission of the laity. What would you consider this vocation and mission to be?

Chiara: Lay people oftentimes look at studies, career, progress, financial success as different ideals to choose from for their lives. I think, however, that basic to the life of every person (as to the lives of all Christians of every vocation) should be a radical choice of God: God given the first place in one's life, before all the other things. We have seen how sensitive people are to this. It is then that the lay person's vocation becomes clear: a vocation that the Gospel proposes to everyone, that asks us to put aside father, mother, fields, everything for God.

So that everyone in the Focolare Movement might live their Christian vocation well, we propose a way of life which is consistent with this choice. It does not consist of repeating "Lord, Lord" but in doing his will.

After taking a survey in the different countries where the Focolare is present we observed in general that one of the obstacles in striving toward sanctity is the difficulty in reconciling spiritual life with one's daily life in the midst of the world. We explain to the people of the Movement that to give God the first place in their lives and to do his will moment by moment means to do, to the best of our ability, all that is involved in our life in the family, at work, at school, whether one is a politician, a garbageman, a clerk and so on. In so doing, lay people find a way to reach sanctity. We tell them that in order to focus our lives on what God wants for us, it is essential to love, to love one's neighbor.

At this point we go from the vocation of the laity to its mission. We should not think of this mission as an "activity" of the apostolate, as something tacked onto one's spiritual life. It is instead, an expression of one's spiritual life. If people love God and want to do his will than they must love their neighbor and therefore love one another. And if we truly love each other as he loved us we will put into practice Jesus' new commandment, which is the heart of Christianity. In so doing we establish the presence of Christ among us, we build unity and unity bears witness to Christ as Jesus said in his last prayer to the Father: "That all may be one, so that the world may believe."

This witness of life, according to me is the primary way for the laity to fulfill their mission, even before speaking or carrying out specific activities. It is a witness of life.

Priests have preaching the Word as their primary task. (From the very beginning the Apostles entrusted other services to the laity and maintained for themselves the task of praying and preaching the Word) while for us lay people it is essential to go ahead first with the basic witness that the first Christians gave. Primarily it is the witness that Jesus indicated: "By this shall all know that you are my disciples ..." because we love one another.

"See how they love one another ..." people said about the first Christians.

I will cite a small example from our Movement. Several years back, after coming in contact with Buddhists of a large Association for spiritual renewal, I was invited to speak to twelve thousand of them about my Christian experience. Why? Since we are spread out in many countries they had seen a witness of the kind of the early Christians. They became interested. They said you are different from other people, you love one another. They wanted to know why. In the end, they said they were beginning to understand the meaning of the Blessed Trinity, to understand what love is. A very open dialogue is still continuing. This shows that words come afterward, as an explanation of a life which appears new and is a Christian life.

It seems to me our whole prophetic role as laity is concentrated in this. Naturally the Word will then be communicated through the activities we carry out in the individual ecclesial Movements: there will be those who have a "Meeting," those who give Mariapolises, others undertake one activity or another.

Question: In this regard how do you see the function of the ecclesial Movements in the missionary and prophetic prospective?

Chiara: With great joy I participated in the preparatory meeting for the Synod held at Rocca di Papa. Qualified lay persons from all over the world and representatives of various Movements and Associations were present there. My joy came from the fact that in all these old and new Movements one could feel something alive, Jesus who is alive. There is life because one rediscovers Jesus, one relives his or her baptism. You could call these persons committed Christians, I would say, Christians who live as such.

Another task of the laity is to bring the Christian spirit into the things of the world. Here, as well, I can see how useful these Movements can be. They all work in the area of the family like Schonstadt, Focolare, etc. What happens? The family is renewed because Christ is brought into the family.

I think these Movements approved by the Church ought to be helped to grow. I'm not saying this for reasons of personal gain for the Focolare Movement but for the personal gain of Christ. You can see how the charism they carry is, in a sense, complete; they emphasize all of Christianity from a particular viewpoint . They work among families and in society, in the fields of work, politics, arts, science, economy, education, in every area. We, too, are involved in all these different areas, these "worlds," where we try to bring Christ.

I wouldn't want to forget, of course, all the other lay Christians who are trying to bring Christ and Christian values into this secularized world of ours.

The preparatory meeting emphasized how important it will be for the Synod to address the 95 percent of Catholics who do

(Continued on page 28)

mariapolis '87

This year, seven Mariapolises were held in the U.S. (East Coast, Midwest, Southwest), Canada (East and West Coasts), the Caribbean, and the vacation Mariapolis in Hyde Park, New York.

by Sharry Silvi

Mariapolis 87. They were many and they were splendid. Some are gone and some will still take place in the months to come since seasons are different in different hemispheres and Mariapolis comes with the sun. Seventy-eight took place just in July and August with over 55,000 participants, just to mention a figure.

Mariapolis comes to life like a beautiful flower that blooms suddenly and apparently for a short time. Yet we know it is only appearance. In reality Mariapolis is destined to live on because those who have been to one take it with them like a seed that will bear fruits of life somehow, somewhere. The exceptions are few.

The theme of this year's Mariapolis was "The Effects of Living the Word." Talks and experiences developed it over five days, during which everything said or done was geared to building a family that comes together in mutual love.

It is this desire to live Jesus words "Love one another ..." that makes the Mariapolis what it is, that transforms a group as varied as you can imagine into a family. Every year it seems to be a miracle, the miracle of a community that has become one.

And in unity is the presence of Jesus.

His presence is the gift of the Mariapolis. Everything with him is relevant not only when the Mariapolis comes together for the most important ►

The Mariapolises were gifted with the presence of several bishops. In the picture on top we see Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago during his visit to the Midwest Mariapolis and Bishop Abreu of Mao Monte Christi (directly above) during the Mariapolis held in the Dominican Republic.

Some comments from the Mariapolis: A young man, "This life is a taste of heaven on earth;" another person, "This was the Mariapolis in which I put my life in God's hands;" a seminarian, "A seed has been planted in me and I don't want to let it die;" another person, "This marks a new beginning in my life."

moment of all, the celebration of the Eucharist, or to pray at the closing of a full day, but also to play, talk, walk or meet old friends and make new ones, teach children a song or learn one yourself.

His presence is what makes you say at the end: I wish we could stay here forever but since we cannot I'll take Mariapolis, its sense and its secret, its powerful reality with me.

Then you go and you love and you do it for God and sooner or later someone will respond and you will be two united in his name and he will be present. He said it "... there am I in their midst."[1]

FACES OF THE MARIAPOLIS

Jesus' presence in a world often cold and seemingly indifferent, yet always longing for something deeper, something more, something better, a world longing to find God.

I wish everyone could go to a Mariapolis. Have you ever been to one? Probably yes, but if you have not let me invite you to Mariapolis '88, you will never regret it.

□

1) Mt 18:20.

(The dates and locations of next year's Mariapolises will be published in *Living City*.)

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED: MANKIND FIRST

The "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day" is the title of the document released March 10th by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
Sixty-two theologians, moralists and ethicists, twenty-two geneticists, biologists, sexologists and numerous bishops' conferences contributed to the document.
In light of its importance to the bioethics debate we here present a commentary article to it.

by Amedeo Ferrari

One day I watched two children at play with a talking doll. They were turning the doll all around in an effort to find where the voice came from. Before long an arm came off, then a leg ... until they found the voice box which had made the doll so like themselves. How disillusioned they looked then as they beheld the pieces of the now voiceless doll!

Not unlike these children, humanity has been trying everything possible to discover the mystery of its being, the meaning of life. This quest has most recently led us to the point of destroying in the process what sets us apart from the rest of creation, what makes us "something more": the spiritual dimension.

We are reducing ourselves to an object, a mere composite of various organs which form a body. Nietzsche, the prophet of the death of God, put the following words on the lips of Zarathustra: "I am only body all in all and nothing else."

Alarming consequences for mankind—deprived of its meaning—have begun to surface through the applied technology of the various sciences: genetic engineering, medicine, and biology which impact on the reproductive process using artificial procedures.

During a six month period over 200 interviews were conducted by a French television network throughout the U.S., Canada, France, Italy, Sweden, Holland, and Belgium and then televised for a program entitled "The Sorcerers of Life." The people interviewed were either unable to have children or, out of fear of having abnormal children, had turned to all the options modern science provides: in vitro fertilization, the freezing of embryos, donor ovum or sperm, leasing of uteruses, or they had undergone sophisticated techniques of experimentation upon human embryos and fetuses.

By the end of the program the viewers were left with some disquieting questions: What will the children of the year 2000 be like? Will they be children born of love or of science? Will they be children of their own parents or of the generosity or speculation of known or unknown biological parents? Will the children be "cloned," that is, mass produced according to the pre-determined model of scientists? Will they be children condemned to death at the beginning of life because an examination of the fertilized ovum revealed that they were perhaps blond instead of brunette, a boy and not a girl? A child can now have two fathers or three mothers: what is a mother then, what is a father?

It is a known fact that applied technology has mastered the secret of human life. Science is able to produce human beings as it does any other product. In so doing it has arrived at the absurdity of transforming the value of life, which is for the collective "good" of humanity, into something privatized.

In a perplexing 1980 U.S. Supreme Court decision it was written that new forms of life can be patented just as an invention is. Along the same lines, a professor of philosophy and law at an Italian University claimed "The micro-organ-

ism assembled in the laboratory ... or the cells born from the fusion of human cells with those of a mouse in order to produce antibodies are to be considered original living phenomena, a fruit of human ingenuity and as such should be eligible for patenting." A French doctor reached this conclusion: "We will become God now in a certain sense."

Because of this challenge posed by technological science a cry has gone up from various quarters for light on the subject.

Scientists, doctors, biologists and gynecologists have asserted that besides biology and medicine, other disciplines should give their input, and many people who consider the Church "an expert in humanity" have asked it for clarification.

The Church considered it a duty to offer its contribution so that this need of humanity might find an answer; and she has done so offering "to human reason ... the light of revelation."[1] The Church performs this service out of the love "she has for mankind" and she can do it "contemplating the mystery of the incarnate Word" in whom "the mystery of man" can be understood.[2] Mankind's dignity is revealed to it in the Gospel, and the Church invites humanity to discover fully the truth of its own being."[3] The fact is that we need wisdom even more than science, or better science should unite itself with wisdom in order to illuminate humanity's way toward the civilization of love.

The Essential Element

The point of departure in building the civilization of love is to be found within. Once we come to realize that we have received life as a gift of love then all life from the first moment of conception, through growth, birth, development and maturity has only one meaning: to be a gift. A gift, in fact, should be returned with a gift.

Every aspect of human life tends towards fulfillment through self-giving: whether it be of the psychological order (sensitivity, affection), the physical order (drives, desires) or the spiritual order.

"Human embryos obtained 'in vitro' are human beings with rights: Their dignity and right to life must be respected from the first moment of their existence."
(Instruction on Respect for Human Life)

Vatican II affirmed that "man is the only creature on earth that God has wished for himself' " and only through the sincere gift of self can he find fulfillment.[4]

Psychology recognizes that love is the dynamic force that gives the human person the capacity to evolve and attain maturity as a person. It is through the capacity to love that a man and woman can make a gift of their own differentness which characterizes their sexuality at all levels: thought, affection and spirit.

In marriage this mutual giving reaches the gift of one's own body. "In the act in which they express their conjugal love," the Pope says, "the spouses are called to make of themselves a gift to one another and all that constitutes their being as persons (therefore also the body) is included in this gift giving."[5] That is why the total and complete gift of love in marriage, besides leading the couple toward unity, reaches out in the direction of the sacramental grace and opens itself toward responsibility for human life, for procreation.

The couple, "as they give themselves to one another, they give besides themselves, the reality of a child, a living image of their love ... the living indissoluble concrete expression of their paternity and maternity."[6]

What a miracle of love the birth of a child is, the birth of a human being! A person then can never be used as a means toward other ends. This also implies that the way life is transmitted must also be love. The couple "come to be associated with the creative act of God and prolong it in time.[7]

The Moral Value

Several conclusions can be arrived at which can serve as moral guidelines.

One conclusion: The beginning of human life can not be decided by a doctor or scientist. ►

As professor Nicolo Natali, president of the national association of conscientious objectors in the field of health in Italy has said, "The person is a person even in the form of one cell. If the embryo is a human being, then experiments cannot be performed on this cell which represents the origins of all persons on earth."

If science has unequivocally demonstrated that the first cell formed by the meeting of the masculine and feminine gametes is a person from the beginning because it already contains the potential of autonomy and consciousness, it is logical that that cell "should be respected and treated as a person." Therefore "if prenatal diagnosis respects the life and integrity of the embryo and the human fetus and is directed toward its safeguarding or healing as an individual, then prenatal diagnosis is morally licit.[8]

A second conclusion: If body, mind and spirit indivisibly come together to form the human person than none of these three elements can be eliminated without destroying the person. It is not possible to experiment on one element without affecting or harming the others. Therefore the human body cannot be considered only "a mere complex of tissues, organs and functions, nor can it be evaluated in the same way as the body of animals...."[9]

The reason behind this is that the human body in all its parts is the visible and tangible expression of its soul and spirit. If you do not respect the body, you do not respect the person. This is why the Church considers as licit "procedures carried out on the human embryo which respect the life and integrity" of the embryo and do not involve disproportionate risks for it, but are directed toward its healing, the improvement of its condition of health or its individual survival."[10]

A third conclusion: within the free and conscious relationship of love between the couple who gift their sexuality to each other in the act of generation are enclosed—as in the nucleus of an atom—two relationships that are at the basis of all the expressions of human life. One is the unitive aspect, the gift of love expressed through the body and open to life. The other is the procreative aspect, the beginning of the life giving process of a new human being which follows the other.

Humanity has already experienced the catastrophic consequences of the splitting of the atom, of the breaking of the physical ties within it. Perhaps because we are once again blinded by the myth of science we are beginning to experience the outcome of artificially interfering in the relationships of human life.

With contraceptives of every kind, science has come on the scene to artificially prevent the life that would come from the gift of love. For this reason the Church considers illicit all unnatural methods which would break that relationship. ►

The document on "Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation" has great historic merit because it constitutes the first effort to submit a serious bioethical problem to rigorous ethical analysis. It is not easy to give an exhaustive definition to bioethics. It sets before the researcher (but not only the researcher) for reflection the limits of domination of man over man in the biomedical field. It therefore has to do with the issue of abortion, birth control, euthanasia, the manipulation of cells and genetic material, with artificial fertilization. All these problems are related to the great mystery of life.

According to the most recent studies, life appeared on earth about three and a half million years ago when, in the primordial ocean, DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) began to form setting off a marvelous chemical process and the most primitive life forms began. Man made his first appearance on earth some seven million years ago. Through a series of absolutely natural phenomena since then, mankind has evolved to our day and human life has been transmitted up to now through natural methods. It is a marvelous miracle of nature each time a human being is born.

Conception is an extraordinarily complex biological

event and, under certain aspects, still mysterious. About five hundred million spermatozoa are emitted and from among these only one (after travelling, along with others, a distance equal to twenty thousand times one's body length) will reach and perforate the membrane of the ovule and provide half its chromosomal makeup. From the union with the other half of the chromosomes of the ovule will come a human being, "unique, unequal to any other, the likes of which has never existed in the world nor ever will since the chances of twice reuniting so many different particles in the same order, are non-existent. Every human being that dies is irreplaceable."[15] This elementary truth should suffice to provide an ethical frame of reference for every researcher or doctor who then should approach the delicate problems of procreation or genetic modification with great respect for the biological identity of every single human being.

Today science has made procreation without a sexual relationship possible. This carries "grave risks" among which the most serious is that of delegating to technicians the power of deciding the origins and destiny of human beings. At present there are sixteen methods of artificial fertilization. For the sake of brevity I will list only the most important ones: 1) Heterologous Artificial Insemination—a technique to obtain conception by using the sperm from a donor other than the husband. The child will be genetically similar to the mother but not the father. 2) GIFT (Gamete Intra - Fallopian Transfer) involves extracting an ovum from the woman at the time of ovulation through surgical means, placing it near sperm cells in a catheter and then inserting both into the fallopian tubes. Fertilization then takes place in a natural way with the sperm of one's spouse. 3) FIVET (Fertilization In Vitro - Embryo - Transfer) what is called a homologous sperm (that of the spouse) or heterologous sperm (that of the donor) is placed in contact "in vitro" with the homologous or heterologous ovule. Fertilization takes place in a test tube outside the bodies of the couple. The embryo is then transplanted in the uterus of the mother or of another woman. Through artificial fertilization a child can have as many as five parents: donors of the eggs and sperm, a surrogate mother who carries the child to term, and the couple who raise the child. The way the FIVET method is currently carried out several ovules (eight or nine) are extracted from the woman and for this reason eight or nine embryo are contemporaneously fertilized "in vitro." Approximately one half of these "spares" are frozen, while the others are transplanted in the uterus. Only one of these will become attached and the others will die. The majority of the frozen embryos die as well.

Today science has made procreation without a sexual relationship possible. This carries "grave risks" among which the most serious is that of delegating to technicians the power of deciding the origins and destiny of human beings.

In 1985 a survey was taken. Out of the two hundred centers carrying on artificial fertilization, sixty two responded. The results were recently published by the director of the Human ►

Genetics Institute of Rome's Gemelli Policlinic. Of the 14,585 artificially fertilized embryos only half were transplanted (7,993). Of these, 6,624 died (82.9 percent) since they were not implanted in the uterus and 1,369 were carried forward but of these, 628 ended being aborted. Looking at totals then, of the 14,585 embryo only 600 were actually born which is equivalent to about 4.1 percent of all the embryos originally produced. To these figures should be added all the embryos produced unfortunately only for purposes of experimentation.

These alarming figures ought to make us stop, think and recognize the importance of submitting all biomedical work to the most rigorous ethical considerations. We need to rediscover and vigorously affirm, as does the Vatican document, that science cannot be neutral, that it must always, in every research project, put itself at the "service of the human person, of his inalienable rights and his true ... good."[16]

The following affirmation makes things very clear for the doctor, the researcher and the couple as well: "No objective, even though noble in itself such as a foreseeable advantage to science, to other human beings or to society, can in any way justify experimentation on living human embryos or fetuses, whether viable or not, either inside or outside the mother's womb. The informed consent ordinarily required for clinical experimentation on adults cannot be granted by the parents, who may not freely dispose of the physical integrity or life of the unborn child."[17]

The desire of the couple to have a child and that of scientists to further knowledge in the biomedical field for the future good of humanity is not sufficient cause to justify these procedures. This attitude which is unguided by ethical principles leads to a productionistic, technological and anti-human mentality. "Science without conscience can only lead to man's ruin."[18]

For these reasons, only if science does not lose sight of moral norms which are always valid and guarantee the respect and full realization of the individual can it truly work for the good of mankind. The Vatican document also takes into consideration the suffering of sterile couples indicating methods that safeguard the dignity of procreation as the only possible remedy.

A researcher in Turin has said that it won't be long before a method will be available whereby the ovule will be able to reach the fallopian tubes and be fertilized naturally by sperm without the need for surgery. We are all the same convinced that individuals guided by right principles are capable of properly fostering the great undertaking of the birth of a human being.

Antonio Acquaviva
University of Siena

With the different forms of artificial fertilization, genetics could arrive at breaking the relationship between the sexual act which initiates life and the gift of mutual love between the spouses in procreating.

Instead "the transmission of human life," Pope John XXIII brought out in Mater et Magistra, "is entrusted by nature to a personal and conscious act."[11] And so even if today's technology has made it possible to procreate apart from sexual relations through the meeting "in vitro" of the sperm and ovum taken from the man and the woman ... what is technically possible is not "ipso facto" morally admissible."[12]

A Professor from Turin, vice president of the Society for Fertility and Human Sterility in Italy, a man who until last year carried on research in "in vitro" fertilization, left his research group saying: "The main reason that led me to abandon my research was the certainty that it is impossible to procede with in "vitro" fertilization and at the same time respect every single embryo as a potential human being."

We cannot ignore, however, the suffering and legitimate hopes of sterile couples. The desire to have a child expresses the vocation to parenthood which is a part of conjugal love. To want a child or at least to be open to transmitting life is a necessary prerequisite from the moral point of view for responsible human procreation. "But this good intention is not

"The procreation of a new person, whereby the man and the woman collaborate with the power of the Creator, must be the fruit and the sign of the mutual self-giving of the spouses, of their love and of their fidelity."
(Instruction on Respect for Human Life)

sufficient for making a positive moral evaluation of in "vitro" fertilization between spouses."[13]

Instead the Church is open to research and to the use of "certain artificial means to facilitate the natural act or to ensure that the natural act normally performed achieves its proper end."

As I finished reading this Instruction on respect for human life one particular thing seemed clear: the Church was not afraid to say to the world's scientists that all things considered, the human person comes first. It had the courage to remind those whose task it is to establish laws for social progress, of the words of Christ: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." As a result every person becomes our neighbor. The document clearly points toward the goal we should aim at, knowing that we have within us a meaning, an essential element which is the basis for our moral actions. It is this meaning that leads human freedom on toward responsible behavior, according to a moral law which leads us to act always more consistently in harmony with the idea that the Author of life has in mind for us.

As I read the newspaper and magazines which commented on the document, I recalled the protest raised by several American artists who feared that restoring the works of Michelangelo would ruin them. In fact, the works of an artist carry the artist's idea and no one should manipulate it.

We read in the first verses of the Bible: "God created man in his own image and likeness." Might not the Church's intervention be a contribution to the humanity of the year 2000 so that it might retrace the original idea of its Artist and begin to travel along the road that would lead it to become a true masterpiece? □

1) Instruction on Respect for Human Life, introduction, n. 5; 2) Gaudium et Spes, n. 2; 3) Instruction, introduction n. 1; 4) Gaudium et Spes, n. 25; 5) Pope John Paul II, Discourse to priests participating in a seminar on "Responsible Procreation," Sept. 17, 1983; 6) Pope John Paul II, apostolic exhortation "Familiaris Consortio, n. 14; 7) ibid. n. 11; 8) Instruction, introduction, n. 2-3; 9) ibid. n. 3; 10) Familiaris consortium, n. 1; 11) Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, III; 12) Instruction, introduction, n.4; 13) ibid. n. 11 B 5; 14) Pope Pius XII, International Congress of Catholic doctors; 15) Robert Debre', Venire al mondo, Citta' Nuova Ed., 1978, p. 16; 16) Instruction, introduction, n. 2; 17) ibid.; 18) ibid. n. 4.

ECUMENICAL NEWS

Progress in the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue

Bari. From June 9th to 16th the Joint International Commission for theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches met for the second period of its fourth plenary session at Cassano delle Murge in Bari, Italy.

Last year the meeting was held here as well however the number of delegations present was insufficient to approve the final document and so this year's meeting was planned. Forty-five members of the Commission attended (twenty-five Catholic and twenty Orthodox) out of the fifty-six members. The Orthodox delegations from Czechoslovakia, Georgia (USSR), and Russia were not able to attend.

This year there were different opportunities for contact with the Church faithful of the city of Bari: a procession with the icons, an episcopal ordination, the celebration of the Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy in the Basilica of Saint Nicholas. Metropolitan Elia from Beirut said on that occasion: "Now at a time when a planetary civilization is painfully coming to be, we cannot live, we can no longer go ahead without each other. Pride, scorn and fear have separated us. Humility and love will unite us."

Approval of the Second Document

After a week of intense work, the commission approved the text: "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church." The document is composed of two parts. "The first presents essential themes for the arriving at complete communion: the profession of a common faith, the liturgical expression of the faith, the formulation of the faith and its various 'symbols,' conditions for communion in faith, the true faith and communion in the sacraments, the unity of the Church in the faith and in the sacraments. The second section deals with the sacraments of Christian initiation in relation to the unity of the Church. The liturgical celebration of these sacraments in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches contains many differences: immersion or infusion in Baptism, the separation in time of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, the rather recent practice of inverting the traditional order by admitting baptized Christians

Bari has been a privileged site for the dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. In the cathedral of St. Nicholas of Bari rests the remains of the saint venerated by both east and west.

to the Eucharist before they have been confirmed.

"Progress was made in resolving these questions and in recognizing the legitimacy of the existence of different traditions in each Church but the Commission noted that there remains the need for further serious consideration to be given to the theological and liturgical questions raised during the discussion.

"One of the principles adopted by the Commission at its first meeting in Rhodes (1980) for guiding its work, is that the dialogue of love should continually accompany the theological dialogue. The members of the Commission repeated the condemnation of proselytism already expressed on many occasions by authoritative leaders and groups of both Churches."[1]

The Next Session

There have been two documents approved then since the Catholic-Orthodox theological dialogue began in 1980. The first was published in 1982 and regards the sacramental concept of the Church common to both entitled: "the Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity."

These two documents constitute a solid foundation for the dialogue to follow next year as the third document will be examined entitled: "The Sacrament of Order (Ordination) in the sacramental structure of the Church, in particular the apostolic succession for the sanctification and the unity of the people of God."

The next plenary session of the Commission will take place in June of 1988 when the Orthodox Church of Finland will offer hospitality in the monastery of New Valamo.

Gabriella Fallacara

1) The Roman Observer, June 30, 1987, n. 26, p.7.

RELIGIONS

The Jewish Seventh Month

The Jewish New Year began with Rosh Hashanah on September 24th. It is the 5,748th year according to Jewish tradition.

Rosh Hashanah, is the festival celebrated on the first day of the month of Tishri (September/October), the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. It is when a new year begins, in fact, that one is more inclined to reflect on the meaning of life. The feast celebrates the beginning of the beginnings: the creation of the world, a free gift of God to all men so that in collaborating in his creative action they can enjoy it, and the "beginning"' of God's salvific intervention: the extraordinary birth of Isaac and of Samuel from mothers who were barren.

Rosh Hashanah according to Leviticus is also "the day of the blowing of the shophar," the ram's horn that in antiquity called the people together. Jews associate the sounding of the shophar with holiness and a call to God.

It is as if all the creatures of the earth were standing before the judgment of God with faith in his Name: he is Adonai, in fact, the Merciful God. The ten days which follow are days of penance, a time of the "teshuva," of returning to God of which the shophar is a reminder. The symbolism of the ram's horn goes back to Abraham's obedience to God in his readiness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. A ram was the animal Abraham substituted for his son.

The tenth day of the New Year (this year October 3rd) is called Yom Kippur, or the day of Atonement, which concludes the period of penitence, prayer and introspection. It is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar and is even commemorated by those who are not religious.

In the days preceding Yom Kippur Jews usually pray for the dead and visit the ceme- ►

tery. It is a day to abstain from work and to observe a strict fast in order to atone for the sins of the past year. A characteristic part of the prayers is the confessing of sins which the whole community does together.

Observance of the feast calls for repentance, for sins committed against God and neighbor. Fraternal reconciliation is practiced in the case of sins against one's neighbor, and the resolution is made to not commit them again. Underlying this, however, is the perception of the infinite mercy of God that makes one's return possible. After the confessing of sins, it is customary to spend the rest of the day in prayer or in reading the Torah.

The most joyous feast of the year, Sukkoth, on October 8th, follows Yom Kippur by just five days. This feast of the Tabernacles, or Booths, is one of the three major pilgrimage festivals of Judaism. It was Israel's joyous, thanksgiving, autumnal harvest festival for the ingathering from the threshing floor and the wine-press. It is celebrated in the booths that families builds out in the open or on a terrace from which fruit, leaves, flowers are hung in order to express the joy of the harvest. Sukkoth also recalls how God protected Israel and did not leave them without food and his own Presence as they wandered through the desert. Also this feast is a reminder that possessions are a gift of God destined for all, and of the joyous submission to the covenant.

The book of Numbers describes the first day of the seventh month as the "day of the blowing of the shophar," a ram's horn sounded as a call to repentance. Postbiblical Judaism named this day Rosh Hashanah.

The day after the eighth day of Sukkoth is called Simchat Torah (the rejoicing in the Torah). Great festive dances are customary for the occasion. In the synagogue: the scrolls of the Torah are carried in procession, preceded by the people and especially by children singing hymns of hosanna. The last and first parts of the Torah are read. This rite marks the closing and the new beginning of the cycle of readings of the Torah.

Annamaria Pericoli

LOVE IS STRONGER

by Matteo Silvan

A new life

Part VI

Lazarus Come Out, *a book published by New City Press is the autobiography of Matteo Silvan.*
Love is Stronger *starts where the other ended, with the death of his wife Teresa and with the beginning of a new chapter in his life. Up to this point, Matteo has recounted his dramatic spiritual journey. At fifty years of age, a family man at the peak of his career in government service, he nevertheless experienced a void in his life. One day he stopped to talk to two young women from the Focolare who came to visit his daughter. From here his journey took a decisive turn. In the Mariapolis he went into a crisis: he was too busy for God and yet His call was irresistable. We resume our story now after Matteo has given his "yes" to God and continues his quest to know God's love.*

To fly?

When, many years ago as a married person, I asked to be part of the Work of Mary (Focolare), I also committed myself by taking "promises." They were pronounced privately together with others and they entailed a life of poverty, chastity and obedience in accordance with my state of life. In this way we would be able to lead a normal life, very similar in everything—at least exteriorly—to that of every good husband and father.

Now, for me, everything was changing. The bond was becoming stronger. I knew that my promises could become "vows" now, and once again I asked myself: "Will I make it?"

I approached Gianni with a number of questions. 'When do you think I should pronounce my vows? How should I prepare myself? I feel my soul is ready, but...."

"Don't worry," he answered "You could be a Christian and go all the way to martyrdom without even knowing what the vows are. They are not essential for those who want to reach sanctity. First of all, think of the Beatitudes, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' I know what you mean, you want to respond to God's love. You think how much Jesus loved the rich, young man. This is the love you want to answer to. Spiritually you left all your possessions but you would like to leave them concretely, too. And this is all good. You will be lighter, freer, as you move on to follow Jesus, also physically going along with him wherever he will call you. It will be a general thrust upward, in fact, a thrust towards the very source of love.

"We could say," Gianni continued," that vows are like a flight along the ray that is leading each one of us towards God. We all start out at different points because of our personality, culture, etc. However, the further we walk along our ray, the closer we come to God and to one another.

"Finally, we could say," Gianni concluded, "that with the vows we cut all the bridges behind us. We are lay people like Mary, so we pronounce them privately, but this is so also because they are not an end in themselves, but a means. As life goes on we may not even remember the vows. They are like supports in case of an emergency: like the nets that by law, you need to put under acrobats, who at great heights, perform their feats on the tight rope. There's always the risk of falling."

It must have been a perplexed face that Gianni saw before him because he told me in a gentle, persuasive tone, "Without any doubt these flights presuppose, at least at first, a ►

thrust ahead, some jumps from the nest, even when you're not sure you can fly. Don't you worry, however, somebody will give you a hand. And in the end, once you become free from all the things that tie you down, from the slavery of your senses and the common habits of the world, you will feel ready to jump; you will feel free in your flight."

Gianni finished and I remained silent, reflecting. He made this being free from all things sound very easy, free from the slavery of the senses, free from old habits, etc. Practically speaking, however, I understood that that meant letting go of an entire life! I had always felt this instinct to jump out of my nest. But now, at my age, I felt that if the spirit was ready, the flesh was weak, weaker than ever....

There was silence in the room. Then Gianni, almost in answer to a question I did not ask, told me, "I know it's not easy ... but many will help you. Little by little you will learn this art of 'letting go'.

Letting go

To learn to let go, that is, "to learn how to lose; is an expression that could not but surprise me. In fact I always thought this was a slogan you used in sports, or that it would be the characteristic of strong people who can withstand the blows of adversity without wavering. And yet I knew, even though only theoretically, that the logic of the Gospel is all based on this principle. It's enough to think of sentences like, "He who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:39); "Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit"(Jn 12:24); "Everyone who has given up home, brothers or sisters, father or mother, wife or children or property for my sake will receive many times as much and inherit everlasting life" (Mt 19:29) etc."

I knew all those sentences by heart, but now I felt that I needed to learn how to lose, how to let go in the concrete situations of everyday life, moment by moment. And that was strong. But Gianni went ahead in further detail. "In every moment of the day, especially in the life of the 'focolare'[1] where we aim at being always one with one another, we are called to lose something of our very self, whether it be possessions, opinions, affections ... and ultimately, even our very own personality. This might sound quite harsh to you. I know that for many years, in your own enviroment, you've been an important person.

I had always felt the instinct to jump out of my nest. But now, at my age, I felt that if the spirit was ready, the flesh was weak, weaker than ever....

This might make it harder for you to live in 'focolare.' And yet you can be helped by understanding that our 'losing' is not an end in itself but it is a means to become more similar to Jesus, to leave room for him and as much as possible, to let our ego disappear. In other words, it's like letting go of our old personality to acquire a new one which is Jesus' or Mary's, (which is the same) because Mary is His word fully lived and unfolded. So the moment comes when you wonder what it could be that you have lost.

On the other hand, if you come to think of it, this is one of the essential aspects of Christianity, 'to lose in order to live,' an aspect which is not always understood....

"Yet," I observed, "there are young people, thirsty for existential purity, who go looking for it in the Orient.... There, at least for a time they are attracted by an ascetism which aims at total annihilation of self, or better, total suppression of every desire. They say they do it in order to reach absolute peace, a Nirvana. The symbol of this state for these persons is an extinguished candle."

"I know," Gianni answered, "but it's also true that if they did not stop at the surface of things, they would find this aspect also in Christianity, and this you well know."

Of course I knew it but I liked to hear him speak about it.

"And," he continued, "Christ on the cross reached the apex of self annihilation. In fact, not only did he experience desertion, betrayal, thorns, scourging and agony, but at a certain point he felt he had 'lost' even the presence of the Father. This is why he cried out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken

me?'. This suffering is greater than any other. The pain from the sword piercing his side was nothing compared to the spiritual trauma that that cry reveals to us. You hear the Son of God say that he feels he has lost God. It is the Son of God crying out for God. Where is his identity?"

I understood, and a deep sense of uneasiness settled in on me.

The Religion of Joy

Gianni had noticed my perplexity. I realized it when in the afternoon he started talking about the same subject again.

"I know you are still wondering about what I said this morning on denying ourselves. Yet, think how simple it is. Everytime that you, out of love, do something for your neighbor you automatically deny yourself. It's enough to think of the parable of the Good Samaritan! (Lk 10:29-37). Certainly, he would have to take care of a neighbor in need. And that meant a loss of time and money. Yet, he realized that he would gain much more in inner joy than what he had lost. For us, therefore, the way is not as it may be in certain oriental religions, to suppress every desire of our heart, but rather to see that the desire of loving God and neighbor grows.

"Ultimately," he continued, "our candle, so to say, which seemed to be without flame at a certain moment, in reality, has a more luminous flame than ever, because it is the result of a life like this—with the presence of Jesus, the Risen Lord, among us. Just think for a moment of the words of Jesus before his passion...'Within a short time you will lose sight of me, but soon after that you will see me.... You are sad for a time, but I shall see you again; then your hearts will rejoice with a joy no one can take from you'(Jn 16:19-22).

"No one can take this joy away from you!" Almost as if to himself Gianni continued, "Our religion which is based on self denial is certainly the religion of joy."

I remained silent for a while, sort of speechless. It seemed too good to be true. Is this reality?

To live the present moment, totally immersed in the love and in the sacrifice that is asked of you.

And Gianni continued, "Do you know Dostoevski?" Of course I did. "And do you know how much his life was marked, often tormented, by his search for God? Through ups and downs he finally reached a full understanding of the mystery of Christ which he calls the 'ideal', the only complete ideal existing on earth." At this point he took a magazine from a shelf and began to read to me saying, "Just listen, listen to what he writes on the topic:

'The best use a human being can make of his own personality, of the full development of one's ego, consists in a near annihilation of the ego, of his or her very ego, in giving oneself completely to all and to each one, impartially and without reservations. This is the greatest happiness. In this way the law of the ego becomes one with the law of humanism, and in placing the two elements together, the 'ego' and the 'all', (both annihilating themselves one in favor of the other) reach also the supreme goal of their individual development. Each one on its own. Each one separately."

"Actual Grace"

An old friend of mine, Antonio, wrote to me from Naples and told me that his wife, an elderly woman now, was dying and he was afraid of not being able to overcome this trial. In his letter he confessed that even though he felt he was a fervent Christian, the thought of death frightened him. He asked me for help because he knew that I had gone through the trial of Teresa's death. I felt I could not just offer him words of consolation. I knew I could help him best by telling him how the grace of God in a similar moment had assisted me, minute by minute.

"Dear Antonio," I wrote, "as you know, I have gone through the suffering which now grips your soul. Teresa, in the last period of her life, knew that she could die at any moment, yet she always kept all of this in the depth of her heart. I wanted to go along with God's plans and so I did the same. From these two secret sufferings light slowly emerged, that is, the understanding of the ►

reality to which God was calling us.

I can only invite you to pronounce your own "yes" to the will of God. Don't do it in resignation, but rather with a trustful abandonment to his will. Why should we fear if Someone knocks at our door? We are certainly weak. But a voice from within tells us, 'Fear not, it is I'.

" Take courage, therefore, my friend. Open the door to Jesus. He will come and give you all the graces you need. Also the grace of doing what he is asking of you in each moment. That is actual grace. You know it by name but probably you do not know how powerful it is.

"I am not a theologian, yet I know from experience that the grace of God comes in us in the measure that we let him work. We need to expand our soul, and we do so by practicing some sort of a constant training. It is like getting ready for a race, a race which lasts our whole life. Think of the words of Saint Paul.

"It is a training in accepting the crosses of everyday and loving them. To say that we meet the cross is like saying that we meet with Jesus. We are not interested in the wood of the cross but in the suffering Jesus. How could we not love him moment by moment?

"This training is like collecting pin pricks, and shows no mercy to our ego. When the sword's blow comes, the soul will have so very much expanded as to be able to receive the immensity of the grace coming to us by the One we have loved and served.

"Dear Antonio, you also wanted to know some details about Teresa's last moments. I will tell you very briefly how everything happened.

"It was a Saturday evening, and I had left the house for a few minutes. When I came back I was surprised to find all the lights turned on in the house. Teresa was not sitting at the table where I had left her. I went from room to room calling her, "Teresa, Teresa" to no answer. 'Could she have gone out?' I asked myself. That was impossible. She was not the type of woman to leave the house with all the lights on. "She probably went out to the balcony," I thought. I looked there, but no Teresa.

"Anguish began to grip my soul. 'My Lord, help me to understand,' I said. I went back to the living room and suddenly I saw her body lying on the floor, hidden by a table. I ran to her. I tried to lift her into my arms but I was not strong enough. I called her, crying, 'Teresa, Teresa.! Painstakingly she raised an arm and pointed to her head as if to say: 'Here, here is the pain....'

"I needed no more explanations. Suddenly an incredible energy invaded me. My head was clear. I knew what I had to do and I started immediately. Without agitation, I made a plan with great lucidity. I started by calling the family doctor, then a friend who is a nurse and finally my daughter Chiaretta. As soon as the doctor arrived he told me that the situation was very serious. I went back to the phone to call the headquarters of the Focolare so that they could reach Lucia, my other daughter. I knew she was somewhere in Vancouver, Canada. I asked them to find her and have her come immediately. When the ambulance arrived I accompanied Teresa to the emergency room of the nearest hospital. The sirens opened the way.

It was at that moment that the grace of decision and action left me only to make room for another grace, that of knowing how to suffer in silence. I stood outside the door of the emergency room almost all night. Teresa was in a room with several women and I was not allowed to stay with her. Luckily Chiaretta arrived and spent the night at her side. Another day and another night, followed. And I stood in the corridor. And then, and then....

"But this is not important anymore, neither for you nor for me. Perhaps I let my emotions get the better of me and with them the desire to share everything with you.... My dearest Antonio, the real gift I want to give you is only one: an invitation to live the present moment, totally immersed in the love and in the sacrifice that today is asked of you. The grace to love and to suffer tomorrow, you will receive tomorrow."

(to be continued)

1) A focolare is the household where focolarini live in separate communities of men or women.

WORD OF LIFE

"Whatever the situation I find myself in I have learned to be self-sufficient. I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have an abundance" (Philippians 4:14-12).

"Whatever the situation I find myself in I have learned to be self-sufficient. I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have an abundance."
The community of Philippi, one of the most beloved by St. Paul, had come to his aid by sending donations while he was in jail.

St. Paul was immensely grateful and full of joy not because he was suffering want but rather because such a gesture was proof that the spirit of the Gospel was very much alive among the Philippians.

Even more, to show that his joy was not for himself, St. Paul reminds them how he had learned to be self-sufficient so as to never be a burden on the communities. Moreover, the interior riches that came from Christ were so great as to raise him above every material constraint.

"Whatever the situation I find myself in I have learned to be self-sufficient. I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have an abundance."

This Word of life reveals the personal relationship the Apostle had with his Teacher; a marvelous relationship that enabled him to cope with every circumstance, even the most difficult ones. (cf. Phil 4:13).

Thanks to Jesus living within him, St. Paul was able to face the hardship of poverty and need in which he at times found himself, with indomitable faith and courage. He knew that even times of want are none other than an aspect of the cross of Jesus. The hundredfold promised by the Gospel in material goods and, even more, in spiritual goods would flow from embracing the Cross.

"Whatever the situation I find myself in I have learned to be self-sufficient. I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have an abundance."

His great love for Jesus, however, enabled him to know how to live in circumstances of abundance. And it is a known fact that possessing wealth is perhaps the most difficult situation to handle properly.

In what way did St. Paul know how to do so? By using the monetary contributions that came from many places to help the communities most in need. In so doing, he made everyone understand that sharing in the spiritual riches gained for us by Jesus must be accompanied by the sharing of material riches as well.

"Whatever the situation I find myself in I have learned to be self-sufficient. I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have an abundance."

This Word of life certainly speaks to our times. When it comes to the issue of money, we know in fact, how easy it is to fall into two extreme attitudes diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Gospel. On one hand, it is easy in times of trouble to let ourselves be overwhelmed by anxiety and worry about the future, by discouragement and, at times, bitterness. When all goes well, on the other hand, it is easy to get carried away by elation, by self-sufficiency and selfishness.

How then should we put this Word of life into practice? By knowing—as Saint Paul did—how to live in want and in abundance.

We will know how to be poor if in times of financial hardship we place our trust in the Providence of our heavenly Father who cares for us if we seek his kingdom. We must take the initiative and do all we can to resolve the problem without worrying, however, since worry would indicate our lack of faith. We will know how to live in abundance if we use the economic resources at our disposal according to justice and love so as to build true Christian relationships.

Let us try then this month to live well the financial aspect of our life and that of the communion of goods.

By so doing, we will keep ourselves always open to the work of God and his desire to fill our souls with his kingdom.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

Immune to the pressure

I am a service representative in a very large insurance company. Numbers in my department are "everything": not only the quantity but also the quality of our work is rated. Understandably, this creates a pronounced degree of on-the-job tension.

Ours is the department which receives customer questions and complaints. The switchboard operator transfers calls from the customer to any service representative not already answering a call. Naturally, it is very important to keep the number of customers who are waiting down to a minimum. When so many calls come in that they overflow onto our "sister unit," the people in that unit complain that they have too much work to do. Our unit responds in like manner.

The most dreaded task, however, is to have to take over the switchboard when the operator falls ill. Invariably one of us representatives, is given the job. Not only do you have to listen to the negative comments of whichever unit is receiving the overflow calls, but you also have the supervisor looming over you, making sure you route calls swiftly to open lines. The omnipresent busy signal rate must never exceed ten percent.

Each time my supervisor asked me to cover the switchboard, I would become very tense and I let her know it. One of those days, however, I had just read the Word of life: "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren" (1 Jn 3:14). I realized then that my reaction was anything *but* love for my neighbor.

Then and there I resolved to be as cheerful as possible and to go to the switchboard with no complaints. In fact I got up, went over to the board, and sat down. I adjusted the head phones, resolving all the while to remain *very* calm.

The calls were already blinking and I soon discovered that some of the representatives in our "sister unit" were "busying out" their phones so that no calls could be passed onto them. By mid-morning the busy rate was up to thirty-nine percent and we were quickly approaching our 2,000th call. It was so bad that our district manager was called in.

Just at that moment, a girl from our "sister unit" walked by and asked me a question. I answered her shortly. I immediately felt that all my efforts to keep loving had gone down the drain.

The Word of life came straight back to my mind as the calls kept blinking in, fast and furious. She continued walking and I was not able to get up and go after her. I resolved, at least, to start over right away. I apologized to Jesus and then, amid all the tension, I found a new calm inside of me, a calm which I knew was not my own doing.

One call came in on top of another until there was no time even to see which extensions were open. It was pretty frantic when that same girl came by, the one with whom I had been curt. I offered a quick apology to her. A few minutes later, though, she returned and stood by the desk. She began calling out the extensions which were free.

Under the pressure, I scarcely had time to be surprised. I just smiled up at her to thank her and we continued on like this for another hour and twenty minutes. I felt we both had experienced God's hundredfold: we seemed immune to the pressure and actually were happy in working together. I felt again how God is never outdone in generosity.

R.G.

Behind the events

It was the end of October and Daylight Savings Time had just passed. Instead of getting dark at 8:00 in the evening, it was dark by 6:15. My husband is the soccer coach of my five-year old boy's team. Up until then, he had been holding practice from 5:30 to 6:30. When practice usually ended it was still light out. This particular day it was dark before practice was over. I was loading some of the equipment into the trunk of the car and my husband was talking with some of the parents. My two children were standing right beside me. Suddenly my little boy darted out into the middle of the street. I saw a car coming and the car hit him head on. It threw him quite a distance.

At first my reaction was one of desperation. I screamed and went running to him. He lay in the street in the fetal position staring into space with no movement or response to my voice. I felt completely helpless. I wanted to do something but I was afraid to move him. I just stood there screaming; then a picture flashed through my mind. It was of Mary standing desolate at the foot of the cross with her son dying. I then knew God was asking me too to make this moment sacred. I knew the most valuable thing I could do for my little boy was to be silent as Mary was, to be ready for anything, and to face it with love. A great peace and strength came over me as I said my Yes to this unexpected permission of God. I understood that to love God with my whole heart I must be willing to give my child to God if that was what He was asking of me.

I could hear people around me yelling for someone to call an ambulance. My husband's immediate reaction was not to wait for the medical team but to pick him up and rush to the emergency room ourselves. At first I wanted to dispute his instinctive decision but then Mary came to me again and silence was love in that moment. My husband and I belong to different churches. On the way to the hospital we prayed together for the first time ever. We said The Lord's Prayer over and over again. I had never experienced such unity with him, unity that only suffering could bring. When we were almost at the hospital, our little boy started to cry. What an answer to our prayers. We knew then that he was alive.

When we arrived at the emergency room, the doctors asked that only one parent accompany the child in. When I saw the look in my husband's eyes, I knew I should be the one to stay behind. It was another moment to die to myself and give up everything. It was also a moment for me to totally trust in God's love. I could do nothing of more value for my little boy in that moment than to love the suffering I was experiencing and embrace the will of God. Shortly after, they called for me to come, too.

At first my son was unaware of our presence. Every time the doctors came into the room, they would tell us of another x-ray they were going to take, but they would not say how he was. It was not until midnight that we finally were told the test results. One of the doctors told us that it was a miracle that he had survived and had no head injuries.

As he walked out, he told us we should give a course to other parents on how to stay calm in times of crisis.

With the help of everyone's unity I was able to forgive the lady who was driving the car. When the police arrived at the hospital to get a statement from us I asked if the woman knew our boy was alive. The policeman believed she did not so I asked him if he could return to her to let her know.

The next morning she came to the hospital. You can imagine her pain. She thanked me for asking the policeman to notify her and informed me that she had not left the scene of the accident. She had remained there nearly hysterical thinking that she had killed our son. When she approached his bedside, he smiled at her and said hello. It really struck me to see this, and made me think about what Jesus had said that if we don't become like children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. The next day, the doctors came in to tell us what we were facing. My son had a major fracture of the femur bone. He would either stay in the hospital for three months in traction or be sent home in a body cast for four or five months. It would take a couple

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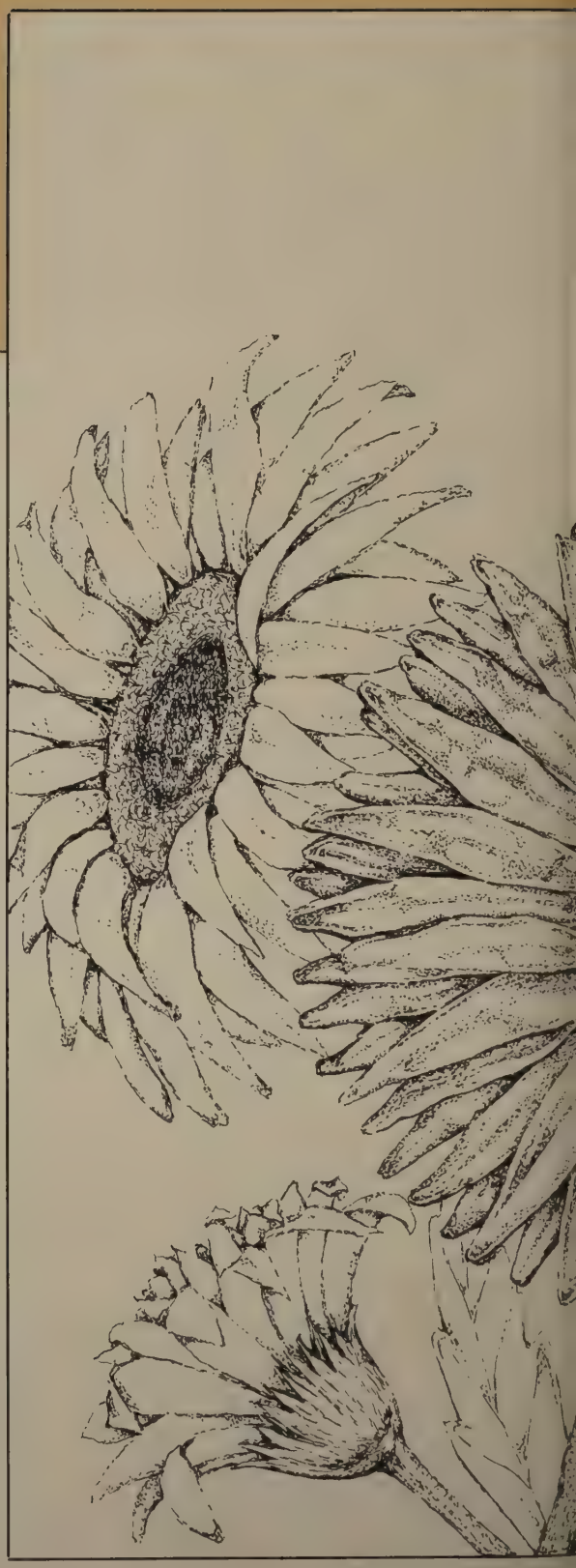
Images of a Summer Gone



At the first warmth of summer you long to leave pavement and city traffic behind.

While travelling I stopped to look for a place of real quiet since even in the woods, in the countryside, radios and motorbikes can persecute you. I had to go a long way before I found it.

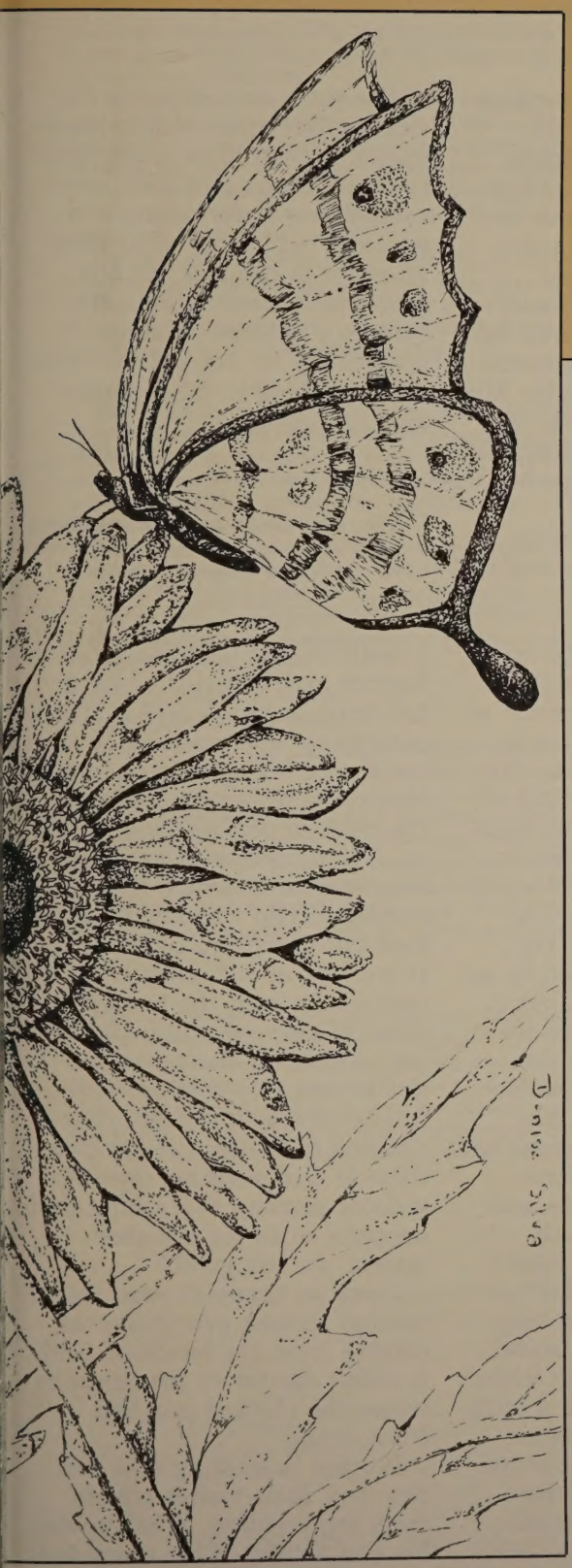
I came across a patch of green. It was shaded and at the border of a dead end street. How relaxing contact with grass can be! I fixed my gaze on a simple yellow button of a flower whose name I did not know which was right in front of me. An insect landed lightly on its corolla and its feet made headway so the insect could penetrate into its heart and drink.

I thought about how docile that flower was to let all the best of itself be eaten by the first insect to pass by. The care of a lifetime had gone into producing and storing it.

I realized how different we humans are, so little in accord with nature, with all of creation. Nature lives the law of love and of giving. It doesn't hord, it doesn't keep anything. Nature not only gives, but it lets be taken. I found myself making an examination of conscience and saw that I was far off.

In the meantime, the insect left, probably to fly to another corolla and let the pollen deposited on its wings slide onto the pistils. Thus it would make a flower germinate. Or perhaps the wind, or the insects mere flight will have detached from its wings the tiny seeds fallen on it as he drank and in this way other flowers further away will come to life.

In nature everything has a purpose: the flower lets itself be eaten but only in this



way will it be multiplied. If we also gave of ourselves in the spirit to those who pass us by—as flowers do—who knows what would happen.

If I offered to acquaintances my knowledge, my discoveries, my capacity, my sense of humor, if I let them be taken by those who want, everyone's capabilities would grow.

Nature is one, all embracing reality where everything is in a relationship of love with everything else. It receives because it gives. If water did not let itself be drunk from the roots, the woods would not draw more water from the sky and we would have a desert.

If birds failed to eat certain insects many plants would die. Everything is in equilibrium. The more science discovers the laws of nature the more we marvel at the ever new always more complex relationships, within the atom, among the stars, yet everything is balanced, in reciprocal equilibrium.

People too are all one, one body: humanity. We do not lose ourselves by giving. Do fathers or teachers diminish themselves when they communicate their knowledge to their children or students? On the contrary, by so doing they fulfill themselves! The same happens in all human relationships even if it may not seem so at first. It may look like a loss and instead it is a gain.

Like a seed that becomes a plant only if it is buried underground and dies.

It is such a difficult law for us to live and yet if we tried it—with constancy—we would see the effects. Those who love win; they grow without imposing themselves and without weapons.

Doriana Zamboni

(Continued from page 5)

not belong to Movements or Associations, in an effort to help them become more spiritually alive by living their baptism.

Question: What results would you most like to see emerge from this Bishop's Synod on the Laity?

Chiara: This may sound utopistic but I think it would be wonderful if—just as the idea of a universal catechism came out of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985—from this Synod would emerge a lay spirituality which addresses itself to all Catholics.

Cardinal Pironio, in a talk at the Teresianum University in Rome, spoke about this spirituality and its main basic points.The lay person should believe in God who is Love, he said, he or she should respond to the love of God by doing His will. He spoke about love, the Word, the Cross. They were all universal and essential points for all lay persons.

I would like to see emerge not so much the specific details of the work carried on by the various Movements (since Movements already have a charism to assist them, and their own competence in formation and mission) but rather what they all share in common. In one sentence, I would like to see emerge a spiritual itinerary specifically for lay persons who do not belong to Movements and Associations.

□

1) Igino Giordani was the first married focolarino, besides being a parliamentarian, writer and lay theologian.

(Continued from page 25)

of days to determine which was best for him. The doctors said that it was a delicate break in a child this age because of the rapid growth and that there was a possibility he might limp for the rest of his life. Each moment of those first days was filled with the unknown. The temptation was strong to slip into worrying about the future but I knew I had to stay rooted in loving in the present moment.

After the third day we were told that the decision was made in favor of the body cast. It was hard to imagine this five year old in a body cast. Many things in my life had to be changed in order to live out this new will of God. One of them was to immediately quit my job. Working had become necessary for the last two years because my husband's industry was undergoing a slowdown.

This was another unexpected will of God that I needed to love right away. When I went in to request personal leave without pay, the management gave me an advancement on my spring vacation pay and an extra month's salary. My husband was able to change jobs, raise his salary and work out of our home. This meant that he was also more available to lift our son when necessary. All of these occurrences were the beautiful plan of God that I could never have worked out. We did fine at home; my son took to the body cast very well. He never complained. He had to be waited on like an infant but it made me very happy because it gave me an opportunity day after day to say Yes to suffering and I never spent a moment without uniting myself to Jesus. Every two weeks we made trips to the doctors and had x-rays taken, patiently waiting for the bone to heal. Each time the doctors told us how important it was to keep the cast until the bone healed.

It was New Year's day when my son came down with a terrible case of the chicken pox. After three days he was so uncomfortable that the doctor made the decision to remove the cast in order to avoid infection. This implied a big step for me. I was afraid we were removing the cast too soon. Then I realized that God allows all to happen and I needed to have full trust in him. I was really struggling with wanting to know who it might have been that came to our house with the chicken pox without saying so. I struggled with my anger over what misfortune it was causing. Then I picked up a meditation written by Chiara. If we look at suffering—I read—only from the human point of view we will be tempted to look for the cause and not go one step further. We forget—she was saying—that "behind the events of our lives there is God with his love who wills or permits everything that happens to us for a higher reason, for our good."

I was so happy to read this. I wanted to take everything as coming from the hands of God; it didn't matter to me anymore where the chicken pox had come from.

My son is walking now and has very little visible effects from the accident. What is visible and lasting is the unity that these five months have built among my family and friends.

M.C.

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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